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NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED IMMUNOLOGIST ADDRESSES CONTINUING NEED FOR CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATIONS

Paul A. Offit, M.D., a distinguished physician, medical researcher and professor in the area of virology and immunology, will speak to healthcare workers in Boise today about why early childhood immunizations are essential to preventing the reoccurrence of the world's deadliest diseases.

Dr. Offit is the keynote speaker for the 'Shot Smarts' workshop sponsored by the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare's Immunization Program. Shot Smarts workshops are an effort to increase the state's early childhood vaccination rate. Dr. Offit will be speaking at the Owyhee Plaza from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. today, and at similar workshops being held in Pocatello and Coeur d'Alene later this week.

"Many of the diseases for which vaccinations are now routinely given during early childhood are rare in the United States because of the immunization programs developed in the last half century," says Offit. "While the U.S. has seen dramatic drop-offs in the number of cases, the threat of reintroduction exists more today than ever due to a highly mobile world population."

Diphtheria, measles, meningitis, pertussis (whooping cough), chicken pox, and even polio are still prevalent in many countries and can be transported as people travel around the world, leaving unvaccinated children – in the U.S. and elsewhere – open to infection.

Immunizations protect children from these life-threatening diseases that can cause permanent health problems, such as brain and heart damage, blindness and even death. Immunizations are recommended at birth, 2-months, 4-months, 6-months, and between 12- and 18-months. Additional vaccines may be required for older children and adults.

Dr. Offit's keynote address for the Shot Smarts workshop will focus on the lessons learned from the Cutter incident, which involved problems with the manufacture of the Salk polio vaccine in 1955. "The Cutter vaccine incident was arguably the worst pharmacy disaster in the history of this country and led to immediate and dramatic industry changes," Offit says. "Most importantly, it established what is now the excellent vaccine regulatory system in this country. It was in many ways the birth of the epidemic intelligence service, and also the birth of absolute liability as it relates to pharmaceutical products."

The final result, says Offit, is that "vaccines today are the safest, best tested things we put in our body. Safer than antibiotics, safer than cold preparations, safer even than vitamins." Educating parents and healthcare workers about the safety and efficacy of today's vaccines is essential to improving Idaho's childhood immunization rate.

Dr. Offit is the Chief of Infectious Diseases, Director of the Vaccine Education Center at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, and the Henle Professor of Immunologic and Infectious Diseases. A distinguished physician, medical researcher and professor in the area of virology and

immunology, Dr. Offit is also author of more than 100 papers in medical and scientific journals and co-author of *Vaccines: What You Should Know* (2003, 3rd ed.).

For more information about immunizations, call the Idaho CareLine at 2-1-1 or 1-800-926-2588 or your local health district office.

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**(Editors: For more information, contact the Idaho Immunization Program's
Andy Noble at 208-334-5901.)**